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**THE MENACE OF ANTI-SEMITISM:**

**WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?"**



by

**Rev. NORMAN D. FLETCHER, D. D.**

**MINISTER UNITY CHURCH (UNITARIAN)**

**MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY**



## THE MENACE OF ANTI-SEMITISM: WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

Shortly after Hitler came to power Edna Ferber had what she calls in her autobiography<sup>1</sup> a "nasty experience". It happened while she was guest with a number of other of a lumber king in northern Michigan. At the dinner table the host announced that all the bankers in the world were Jews and, having all the money, were trying to control the world. Miss Ferber is no coward, not even at a dinner table — which by the way sometimes contains more cowards than any field of battle. Miss Ferber announced to the astonished group that she was a Jew and she tells us that she saw a hatred in the faces of the assembled banqueters equalled only by that in the face of Herr Goebbels himself. Writes Miss Ferber: "... unless an antitoxin (is) soon administered, convulsion (may) rack the whole body of the land." Miss Ferber is not exaggerating. The "convulsion," to carry on her figure that has been racking the unfortunate country of Germany came about through anti-Semitism. We are likely to find over here that anti-Semitism is just one of several Nazi aberrations and one of the tricks used by Hitler to get into power. There were, of course, other factors: the weakness of the German democracy as represented by the Weimar republic, the almost complete lack of training in democratic procedure of the German people, the impossible economic condition and the humiliation of the abominable Versailles Treaty. The one thing, however, which finally turned the trick in Germany and brought the Nazis to power was anti-Semitism.

Is there no significance for us as Americans in the fact that almost every organization that threatens our democracy today, and may be described as marked by fascistic tendencies, and almost every leader of these organizations is openly, not to say violently anti-Semitic? Organizations in the United States for the spread of Fascist doctrine, a prominent item of which is anti-Semitism, number some eight hundred. The Rev. L. N. Birkhead, formerly minister of the Unitarian church in Kansas City and now head of "Friends of Democracy," an organization actively combatting Fascist propaganda, lists some of these organizations: The Silver Shirts, The White Shirts, The Knights of the White Camelia, The National Gentile League, The American Gentile Protective Association, The American Gentile Youth Movement, The Christian American Crusade, The American Christian Defenders, The Defenders of the Christian Faith, The Industrial Defense Association, The James True Association, The German-American Bund. It will be observed that many of these organizations by a gross misuse of the word

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on of which I have been able to describe here, is that



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nism in the world today, Coughlin repeatedly tries to  
k Jewish financiers with the Bolshevik Revolution.  
ughlin often "documents" his statements with astonish-  
ly high sources. In one radio address he said he quoted  
in the "official White Paper issued by the English War  
inet in 1919," which he said he had in his possession.  
ughlin charged that "this official paper prints the names  
the Jewish bankers, Kuhn, Loeb and Company, New  
k, among those who helped to finance the Russian  
olution and Communism." Kuhn, Loeb and Company  
lly denied having any financial relations with any  
ernment in Russia. The Rev. Mr. Kernan hunted down  
White Paper from which Coughlin quoted. It is known  
"Russia No. 1," and in its original form is in the  
ish Library of Information in New York City. Absol-  
ly no mention of Kuhn, Loeb and Company is made.  
sequently Mr. Kernan learned that this charge about  
n, Loeb and Company and other Jewish financiers is  
forth in a scurrilous anti-Semitic sheet published in  
languages in Hamburg, the Nazi "World Service,"  
purpose of which is to set forth the "machinations of  
Jewish underworld." From these two illustrations alone  
n be seen how thoroughly anti-Semitic Father Coughlin  
nd what unethical use he makes of source materials.

Sooner or later someone should get Coughlin for  
and put him behind the bars where he belongs.  
dinal Mundelein says Coughlin does not represent the  
holic Church. I sincerely hope he does not. Alfred  
Smith, most noted American Catholic layman, has  
ken against Coughlin's anti-Semitism. John A. Lapp,  
ed Catholic liberal has recently said,<sup>4</sup> "Father Coughlin  
been on the air for eight or nine years; his stock and  
e has been from the beginning the stimulation of fears  
prejudices. One must suspect the source of any-  
g he quotes. He has been found guilty of shameless  
ortion of material . . . A man who uses in America  
is own an anti-Semitic speech of Herr Goebbels deserves  
loss of the moral respect of all right-minded citizens."

That is good, but not good enough. If any minister  
he Unitarian fellowship to which I belong acted as  
er Coughlin has repeatedly acted, I would expect the  
merican Unitarian Association, and the Unitarian Minis-  
al Union, to disown him. It is not a question of free  
ech. Coughlin has every right to have his say, subject  
ourse to our libel laws. He is, however, a priest in  
d and regular standing of the Roman Catholic Church.  
t church should make an investigation of his methods  
if it finds, which it must, that he distorts and misuses  
s, it ought to take him to task for it. There is a  
onsibility there which the Roman Church obviously has.

In addition to organized anti-Semitism, only a frac-  
on of which I have been able to describe here, is that



which goes from mouth to mouth and often shows itself the attitude of otherwise intelligent and conscientious people. Nothing amazes me more than the way in which some people accept certain notions about the Jews and either by word or attitude, accelerate their circulation. Let me call to your minds a few of them:

(a) Jews have bad manners. Note it doesn't say "some Jews have bad manners," but "Jews have bad manners," which means "all Jews have bad manners." Anyone who knows an Edna Ferber, a Walter Lippman, a Fritz Kreisler, a Paul Muni, or any one of thousands upon thousands of highly intelligent and cultured Jews who have made an inestimable contribution to American life, knows how nonsensical this assertion is. That some Jews are ill-mannered is beyond question. That some have alien manners and customs, are unassimilated, is also true. Let us not forget that the ghetto of yesterday and ostracism of today are largely responsible for this. A persecuted minority will act in the same way. But there are vulgar orientals, vulgar Italians, vulgar French, vulgar English, vulgar Americans, vulgar poor and vulgar rich. Walk through Times Square on any night at six o'clock or any other busy thoroughfare of any large American city and you will see this vulgarity in appalling amounts. Jews have no monopoly on vulgarity. Such vulgarity as there is among them will not be lessened by anti-Semitism.

(b) Jews cheat. That means all Jews cheat. That is a libel. That some Jews cheat is true. Cheating is no monopoly of the Jews. I came from a section of the country where "Yankee trader" is still a term used. If the modern Jew is any more of a cheat than the old-time Yankee trader was, he must be equipped with a whole set of instincts unknown to the rest of the human race. If you are familiar with the consumer movement in this country, you will know that cheating is a somewhat common vice. All industries, all stores, all businesses are run by Jews. You may be quite sure that you are cheated, subtly cheated, practically every time you go to market. For years the American consumer movement has endeavored to get laws passed about foods and drugs, requiring labels describing the contents. Look at almost any ad and you will find in what terms the article for sale is described. The label usually is in terms of some meaningless slogan bearing no real relation to the article for sale. That is a conspicuous form of cheating. The Jews are certainly responsible for all the cheating that goes on daily in contemporary America.

(c) Jews run the business of the country, particularly banking. I have known quite intelligent people to believe this. What are the facts? The magazine, *Fortune*, in 1936 reported that 148 of the 919 members of the New York Stock Exchange are Jews; that of the 420 list

directors who were members of the New York Clearing House in 1933 only 30 were Jews; that Kuhn, Loeb & Company is the only Jewish firm that did any substantial business in foreign loans and that this firm had an amount of foreign loans outstanding on March 1, 1935, of only 8 per cent of the total as compared with National City Company with 11.71 per cent and J. P. Morgan & Company with 19.87 per cent. In a realistic article packed with statistics in a recent number of *Harper's*, Philip S. Bernstein tells us that Poor's "Register of Directors" (1934) lists 80,000 persons as directors of the corporations of America. Of these only 3,825, or 4.8 per cent, are Jews. In such vast industries as oil, steel, aluminum and automobiles, the *Fortune* article already referred to finds that there are almost no Jewish firms.

(d) You never see a Jewish artisan or farmer. That is also a common belief. There is a definite movement of Jews towards the soil. Alvin Johnson of the New School for Social Research<sup>7</sup> estimates that there are certainly 16,000 Jewish farmers in America succeeding, on the whole, rather well. With regard to Jewish artisans he says: "A quarter of the union carpenters of New York are Jews; a fifth of the electrical workers; nearly half of the painters and paper hangers; half the plasterers; half the plumbers and steam fitters; more than half the sheet metal workers." No, all the Jews do not sit in counting houses, run pawn shops, or sell clothes.

Such is the menace of anti-Semitism in America today, so liberately created and spread by highly active and adequately financed organizations, by unprincipled writers and speakers, by the remarks and attitudes of countless people. What can we do? Let me suggest three things.

Let us make every effort to keep ourselves free from the taint of anti-Semitism. Those who think they are immune to the irrationalities and prejudices that are all too ready to fool themselves egregiously. I once thought surely that any educated person was by the fact of his education, his mental training, rendered immune to prejudice, to irrational preference. Such is not the case and now it through my own experience. Rationality is something to fight for continuously with the powers of one's mind and spirit. Why are so many millions spent on some silly ads that endlessly repeat a slogan. Because people come to believe it. It soaks into them. Intelligent and unintelligent alike, we are creatures of our environment. If there is any filth around, we shall take it into our system sooner or later unless we ward it off.

One does not keep himself free by piously uttering words, "I believe in the brotherhood of man." Genuine belief is never a matter of mere acceptance, certainly mere reiteration. We must search, matching fact with



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fact and acting on the beliefs we profess. We must study anti-Semitic propaganda, therefore, and run down every charge.

Free from the taint of anti-Semitism, we must seek the light of our knowledge and good will. The next time you hear a friend say, "The Jew controls this or that," ask for a bill of particulars. Request a showing of facts. He is indicting a whole people. That is always a serious business. Take him to task for it. You will be unpopular? There are times when the price of popularity is much too high!

We must engage in group activity in this whole field of racial prejudice. He who sits back in times like these and says "one person can do nothing," is making himself criminally responsible for what may happen. Join some such organization as the "Friends of Democracy", which is fighting against anti-Semitism and for the ways of democratic and free society. Give it what money you can; circularize its literature. The enemies of democracy, freedom and good will are organized; we must be organized also. Individual effort, our attitude, our action, our living, and group effort will reduce if not utterly stamp out this menace.

That anti-Semitism is a burden, back-breaking and heart-breaking, for the Jewish people is evident. That it is a menace to our free institutions, being a subtle contradiction of them and a frequent tool of those who aspire to be dictators, is likewise evident. If nothing more, we ought to be acute enough to see the inherent threat to ourselves as liberals in the menace of anti-Semitism. For the Jews are not safe, neither is any other group. For if the Jews, then the Catholics, then the liberals of whatever race or sect, — that has been the general procedure in Fascist countries. Freedom, justice, brotherhood — the principles we say we believe in — can be maintained only as they are maintained for all.

\* \* \*

- 1 "A Peculiar Treasure," Edna Ferber.
- 2 "Star-Spangled Fascists," by Stanley High in Saturday Evening Post, May 27, 1939.
- 3 "Coughlin, the Jews, and Communism," by William C. Kernan, — "The Nation," December 7, 1938.
- 4 New York Times, June 12, 1939.
- 5 "Jews in America," Fortune, February, 1936.
- 6 "Some Facts about Jews," By Philip S. Bernstein, Harpers Monthly, April, 1939.
- 7 "The Rising Tide of Anti-Semitism," by Alvin Johnson, Survey Graphic, February, 1939.